

-Media Release-

Community Pastures Cooperative

A First Nations Sustainable Land Management Joint Venture

First Nation Chiefs present a cooperative business proposal to keep 1.6 million acres of ecologically sensitive grazing land in the hands of all Saskatchewan citizens.

Saskatchewan's First Nations, lead by various TLE Chiefs, want to bring forward a cooperative business option called the **"First Nations Sustainable Land Management Joint Venture"** for the federal and provincial government(s) to consider regarding the discontinuation of the Community Pasture Program. Many provincial First Nations are concerned that the Saskatchewan Government intends to sell 1.6 million acres of the province's most ecologically rich grasslands to a select few cattle producers.

"Whenever Crown land is being sold, there are some moral and legal imperatives that cannot be ignored," said former FSIN Chief Roland Crowe. "There are obligations to consider our interests as first peoples and those of all stakeholders. We have an historical and economic interest in the way these pastures will be used and we do not want to see them parcelled up and sold off. Rather than placing them in the hands of a privileged few or worse in the hands of investors and non residents, let's work together to find a way to conserve and manage these grasslands locally and in whole rather than in part for the good of all Saskatchewan people."

With those concerns and that vision in mind, a steering committee representing various First Nations and chaired by former FSIN Chief Roland Crowe has been formed. Crowe is well known nationally for negotiating the Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) agreement in 1992, which was an inclusive and cooperative approach that considered the interests of multiple stakeholders. The successful TLE approach is the underpinning for this current pasture business model. Crowe has contacted the Canadian and Saskatchewan Governments to present this management approach as a superior alternative to simply selling off the 62 community pastures. Roland Crowe said that First Nations believe that this land--some of the last large remnants of the prairie the way it was before settlement--should remain in the public trust and continue to be managed for both economic and ecological imperatives using an inclusive, transparent and third party based governance model.

Key management proposal elements include:

- The Province of Saskatchewan would retain title to all 1.6 million acres of provincial lands currently being managed under the federal government's Community Pasture Program.
- Pastures would be managed by the First Nations Sustainable Land Management Joint Venture retaining all 62 pastures under one coherent long-term vision, managing each landscape and ecosystem according to its particular needs and at the same high level of management fostered by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitations Administration (PFRA) over the past 80 years.
- An inclusive management board would modulate the balance of economic and ecological imperatives, with representation from First Nations, the federal and provincial governments, cattle producers, bison growers, research community and environmental NGOs.
- The initiative would bring economic benefits for First Nations for their work in managing the pasture system, balancing grazing, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity in ways that are both profitable and environmentally sound.

- The ecological value of the native pasture and the protection of species at risk and biodiversity would be a top priority, along with the current and long term grazing needs of small to medium-sized local stock growers.
- To take advantage of the knowledge base of current pasture management staff, a transitional plan would request that all existing managers and riders be offered the opportunity to be part of the new management system, with protection consideration to both pension benefits and salaries.

To develop this inclusive First Nations' business model, the steering committee has engaged the leadership assistance of Carl Neggers, former Director General of PFRA who has significant experience with the highly successful Community Pasture Program.

"Managing grazing lands used by local cattlemen is nothing new for Saskatchewan First Nations" said Neggers. "In fact, several pastures that were established on reserves by the former PFRA were turned over to First Nations management and continue to serve the economic interests of local livestock producers to this day." Neggers believes that under the proposed third party joint venture approach, enabled through a sound and inclusive business model, this pasture management initiative should appeal to the various stakeholders and still achieve important public policy goals. "History has proven that these lands are better managed and more viable from both a business and ecological perspective as contiguous blocks" said Neggers.

From the First Nations point of view, it is a viable and cooperative joint venture business opportunity that appeals to their traditional understanding of using and sharing the fruits of the land in sustainable ways.

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